

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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## A DATELESS BARGAIN.

BY C. L. PIRKIS,

*Author of "Lady Lovelace," etc.*

### CHAPTER XLI.

ALL these details respecting the inquest came to Joyce only in whispers. Even these whispers were unasked for. Four walls now held for her all the best that life had to give her, in so much as they shut in Mab with her fast-waning life, and made a sanctuary wherein she could eat out her own heart with her bitter-sweet memories of the past.

It had not needed the warning of the doctor from Newton Stewart to convince her of the fact that the herald-clouds of the great, dark, silent night were already gathering around Mab, and would soon hide her away altogether from the touch of loving hands, the sight of loving eyes.

Naturally, Joyce's anxieties and responsibilities were doubled by her distance from her friends and the centres of the best medical advice.

She did a good deal of telegraphing. She telegraphed to London, then to Edinburgh, for doctors. Then to Aunt Bell to break the news carefully to Uncle Archie. Lastly to her mother and the old General at their latest address, trusting that, sooner or later, the telegram would follow them and find them out.

After that nothing remained to do but to sit beside her darling, to hold her hand, and watch the white face; the face on which, slowly but surely, was settling the drawn, beaten look that comes to man or woman only once in a lifetime, and which seems to say plainly as voice could say it: "O Death, we have wrestled it out together, and the day is yours."

In due course the doctors arrived, consulted together, and also in due course departed, leaving behind them multitudinous directions for the care and comfort of their patient; but nothing that could be construed into the faintest suggestion of a hope of her ultimate recovery. The shock to her nerves, they said, had shaken her very slender hold of life, and it was now a question not of weeks or months, but of days and hours.

She seemed to be in no pain whatever. From the moment when they had brought her into the room, and laid her insensible on the bed, never a question had passed her lips, nor any sentence that could, however remotely, be referred to Captain Buckingham, or her life in the past.

Joyce wondered sometimes whether that terrible scene in the twilight had fixed itself in Mab's memory as an awful, immutable fact, or whether it had presented itself as one among the many visions, which had helped to efface the border-line between the natural and supernatural to her clouded senses.

All day long Mab lay silent and motionless. At rare intervals her eyes opened, with a wandering, bewildered look in them, as if they held a question that refused to be put into words.

Sometimes her lips would part, and Joyce would eagerly bend down her ear in the hope of catching some word, some sentence, that might tell what were the thoughts the tired brain held. Generally, however, they would close again after muttering some incoherent, unmeaning phrases.

"She will most likely pass away in her sleep," the doctors had said. But was this sleep? Joyce asked herself, as again and again Mab's words would come back to her: "I know now what 'I' means; how

that 'I' may be in the soul or 'I' may be in the body at will." She could almost fancy that Mab, her true, loving Mab, was standing beside her invisible; was wandering through space at will; was anywhere, in fact, rather than penned within that weak, weary form which lay so still on its pillows.

Painlessly and tranquilly the end came at last. Just as the dark night was beginning to creep out of the room through the leaves of the vine which shadowed the window, and the rush of bird-notes outside in the dimness told that day was at hand, Joyce, holding Mab's hand in hers, felt it suddenly grow colder.

Her eyelids trembled a moment, as though they would but could not raise themselves. Then the pale lips moved, and Joyce's straining ears could just detect the whisper :

"In the churchyard in the hollow, Joyce."

"Yes, darling," Joyce whispered back. Her own aching heart told her only too surely to what the words referred.

There fell five minutes of perfect, solemn stillness in the room. Outside there sounded the rustle of the light breeze, the soft wash of the sea on the pebbles.

Then Mab's faint voice whispered again:

"Always the sound of the sea, Joyce."

Joyce's heart was beating wildly. She bent her ear low, and lower. But, for all its straining, it could only catch a few muttered, incoherent sentences.

Once she distinguished the words, "Dieppe — getting dark." Then her thoughts flew back, with a sudden thrill of pain, to the last seaside trip they had taken with their father before his death. There came vividly before her one day, when she and Mab had gone wandering out alone on the shining wet sands at low tide in the twilight, and their father, coming out in search of them, had stood high on the beach calling them by name.

Evidently the same thought was in Mab's mind. A sweet smile for a moment parted her lips, although her eyes still remained closed.

"Coming, father," she said softly, yet distinctly, as though answering a sudden summons.

Then the smile slowly faded, the hand which Joyce held became gradually icy-cold. There came a sigh—and Joyce knew that her darling had gone to claim a better birthright for herself, than any her occult religion could have brought within reach of her hand.

#### CHAPTER XLII.

JOYCE felt herself frozen into silence and insensibility. Her hopes were dead in her heart now, so likewise her fears. Nothing else, in very truth, of agony, of despair, she felt the years could have in store for her. She shrank from none of the sad duties which, of necessity, devolved upon her in the absence of near friend or relative. She herself chose Mab's last resting-place in the little churchyard, and followed her as sole mourner to her grave.

She scarcely realised her own identity as she went about her mournful duties.

"Now you, Joyce Shenstone," she found herself saying one day, as she stood staring in the glass at the thin white face which she could scarcely recognise as her own reflection, "what do you mean to do with yourself for the next forty years? You'll not die yet, you know; you are made of cast iron or marble, not flesh and blood, certainly."

Mrs. Bullen and the General arrived the day after the funeral. Joyce's telegram, after numerous mishances, had overtaken them in the North of Italy, and, though they had hastened their return as much as possible, wings alone could have brought them in time to say good-bye to Mab.

The General was very silent, Mrs. Bullen as diffuse and hysterical as she could reasonably be expected to be.

Between her fainting fits and floods of tears, she told Joyce a strange story which had met them on their way to Tretwick.

It was to the effect that a certain Irishman, by name Donovan, in the act of stepping on board a Greenock trader just about to sail for the North, had been shot dead by some one standing on the quay. The murderer was supposed to be an agent of some secret political society, and had not yet been arrested.

There could be no doubt of the identity of the man Donovan with their old gardener's son.

Mrs. Bullen had plenty of tears to shed for Mab, but her tears had never been known to clog her conversational powers, even in the early days of her widowhood. Side by side her tears and her gossip flowed together.

"My darling daughter," she sobbed; "we were such companions! I never wanted for sympathy with Mab in the house. Oh, and by the way, Joyce, only think! I met Sylvia Buckingham on the platform at Newton Stewart station. She

was in deep black. She looks horribly sallow in black ; years older than I do. Take away her blues and her greys, and her good looks are gone. She was just as kind and affectionate as ever ; kissed me again and again, and asked after everybody. She told me all about her brother's awful death through a fall over the rocks here, just when he was so kindly coming to see you and our darling Mab. Poor George ! I always liked him, although it was very naughty of him to bring all the funny people he did to my house. I should have liked to have introduced him to you, dear." Here Mrs. Bullen turned to her husband : " He was an old admirer of mine, and such a fine, handsome man."

The General raised his eyebrows, but said nothing.

Mrs. Bullen went on : " Sylvia is a most tender-hearted person. She spoke so kindly of poor Ned, and was going, she told me, straight to Greenock to save his poor father the long miserable journey. She said she should arrange all about his funeral, and take possession—for his parents, of course—of whatever property he might have about him. Oh dear, what a tragedy it all is ! It seems death, death, everywhere."

Here a flood of tears prevented, for a time, further speech.

Joyce's heart echoed her mother's last sentence : " Death, death everywhere."

Here was a third door of possible hope shut in her face by Death's unmannerly hand.

#### CHAPTER XLIII.

THE gardener's cottage at Overbury was an altogether ideal place of abode. It seemed constructed of flowers and creepers only, for scarce a trace of brick or wood-work met the eye. Tea-roses framed the windows, and, trailing across the glass, turned commonplace squares into picturesque diamond panes. Honeysuckle defied the pruning-knife ; and, after covering side walls and roof, did its best to render ugly chimney-pots ornamental as well as useful. Boxes on the ledges, filled with the glories of the garden, contributed their quota of colour and odour, while a luxuriant Virginian creeper, " fading here into yellow, kindling there into red," threw its wild drapery heedlessly, lavishly, in all directions.

So much for the exterior. Within all was in sharp, gloomy contrast to this blaze of beauty and colour, for the only son lay

in his coffin in the room which had once been his bed-room, and the old father and mother had wrung their hands, looked in each other's faces, and had sung their Nunc Dimittis, though to another tune to that in which Simeon had sung it in the days of old.

" If he had but kept clear of those secret societies, our brave, strong boy might have been by our side now," was the burthen of their lamentations ; and then they would fall to weeping again.

Naturally, in their eyes, Ned figured as a martyr. Of his identity with the man for whose apprehension on suspicion of murder rewards had been offered, they knew nothing. Captain Buckingham's death had only touched them remotely. They knew nothing of him personally, only by repute, as the brother of a lady who had shown steady, persistent kindness to Kathleen during her short married life, and who now, in their time of sorrow, seemed anxious to extend a like benevolence to them.

They accepted her kindness humbly and gratefully. The old father said a prayer for her as he knelt beside his son's open grave in the little country churchyard ; the old mother sobbed out her wonderment over such unexpected beneficence, with her head on Kathleen's shoulder.

" To think the lady should take such uncalled-for trouble for two old bodies like us that she has never set eyes on," she moaned between her bursts of grief.

Kathleen, who had come from Lough Lea to attend her brother's funeral, seemed to have no tears at command. She stood listening, like one in a dream almost, saying never a word.

The father had a word to say, though, when he came home from the solemn service, with a wisp of crape round his hat, and a face aged by a dozen years.

" I heard from Miss Buckingham this morning," he said ; " she sent Ned's purse, to which, she says, she has added a small amount that perhaps you may like to spend in planting our boy's grave. She asks permission to retain his old silver watch in memory of him. What say you, mother ? "

Kathleen gave a violent start, and a curious look flitted athwart her face. She had not forgotten the promise she had given Ned as to the destination of his watch, if ill-fortune overtook him.

" What say I ? " cried the mother. " There is only one thing to say : let the lady keep

it and welcome. It's only the kindest of kind hearts could ask for such a thing ; I love her for her love to our boy."

Later on in the day, when Kathleen contrived to get her father alone for five minutes, she had a question to put about the watch.

"Wasn't it one of two, father ?" she asked ; "didn't my grandfather give you and Uncle Patrick each a watch on the same day ? Uncle Patrick gave Ned his, I know, when he bought a better one. What became of yours ?"

The father went to a drawer, and produced the facsimile of Ned's watch.

"I put it away," he said, "on the day my old master made me the handsome present of a gold one, when I won the first-class medal for our grapes and pines." The old man looked sadly at the antiquated, tarnished thing. No doubt it brought a rush of memories of pleasant days gone by. "I wanted to have given it you, child, years ago, but your mother said 'twas not smart enough to go with your gay clothes, and laces, and ribbons, and you wouldn't value it."

Kathleen held out her hand for it.

"Give it me now, father. See, I've no laces, or ribbons, or smart clothes, and I should value it for your sake and Ned's."

The father could hardly believe his ears. "The voice wasn't Kathleen's, the look in her eyes wasn't Kathleen's," as he told his wife afterwards when recounting the incident ; "but there—trouble had changed them all, no doubt," he concluded, "and possibly Kathleen found them as much changed as they found her."

The day afterwards another surprise met them, in the shape of an announcement from Kathleen that she was going into service again.

"I shall never go back to Lough Lea," she explained. "I detest the O'Sheas—man, woman, and child. I can't live here to be a burthen on you. I shall ask Miss Buckingham to take me as a travelling maid. She is always moving about from place to place."

The mother had not the heart to utter reproaches, which at one time would have come readily enough to her lips, respecting the girl's folly in marrying a man for whom she had no liking. So she sighed, and said nothing at the moment ; but to her husband she spoke freely afterwards.

"I don't seem to know my own child ; all her pretty ways and love of finery and smart things are gone," she said, looking

back regretfully to the faults and follies for which she had soundly rated Kathleen times without number. "Her marriage with Bryan is a miserable one ; he treats her badly, not a doubt ; he's always away from home, she says, now at one place, now at another. If she can't stay here with us I couldn't choose a better mistress for her than Miss Buckingham ; but I expect after she has been about the world a bit, she'll come back to the old home, and settle down to cheer us up at the end of our days."

So spoke the mother's hopes — short-lived hopes, however. They died of the good-bye Kathleen gave her—a long, strong, silent one—when, after a letter from Miss Buckingham expressing her willingness to accept her services, she set off for Greenock.

Sylvia welcomed Kathleen with more cordiality than she had ever shown to Ned. Nothing could have suited her plans better at the moment than this companionship of the girl under guise of maid.

"She is a silly little prattler," she thought, picturing to herself the trifler of days gone by, not the girl whom the experiences of life had embittered and hardened. "Her vanity lays her at the mercy of everyone who cares to play upon it. She can only become dangerous by accident ; under my eye no such accident can arise. If we want to make use of her as an unconscious instrument, she can be made to do good service."

So Kathleen received a hearty welcome to the Greenock hotel, where Sylvia had taken up her quarters. With great apparent candour Miss Buckingham told Kathleen all she knew of her own plans, implying that she expected her frankness to be repaid with a similar confidence.

"I may go to France," she said, "or it may be to Vienna, or perhaps back to New York. I can't tell in the least till I hear from my friends across the water. Tell me, do you think you will like long journeys and short rests for a time ? And what has become of your husband, and when do you expect to see him again ?"

To which Kathleen replied with a similar candour, that long journeys and short rests would suit her better than anything else just then ; that she felt she needed change of air and scene after the terrible shock of her brother's death. As for Bryan, she had not the remotest notion where he was. Of late, his absences from home had been frequent and prolonged.

She feared, but of course she could not be sure, that he had joined some Fenian society. If so, she knew his home would see but little of him, and as she hated old Mrs. O'Shea and the dilapidated O'Shea farm, she didn't care if she never set eyes on the place again.

Sylvia looked long and steadily at the girl as she finished speaking.

Kathleen bore the gaze without flinching. Whatever suspicions might have arisen in Sylvia's mind, not a muscle of Kathleen's face gave substance to them.

On the day after her arrival at Greenock Kathleen fell into her maid's duties. Sylvia made the kindest of mistresses, putting Kathleen on a thoroughly friendly, confidential footing, and showing a sympathetic curiosity as to the girl's private affairs which might have proved embarrassing to many in her class of life.

Not so with Kathleen. She reciprocated sympathy with an apparently frank confidence, and opened her heart freely to her mistress while she fulfilled the duties of the dressing-room. Every question as to her husband and her married life she answered, with a candour scarcely to be expected in so newly-made a wife.

"The truth of it is, ma'am," she said, while her deft fingers busied themselves with Sylvia's crape gowns or bonnets, "Bryan got tired of me within a week of our wedding-day. It's my belief the O'Gorman girl has turned his head, and he'll be uncommonly glad to be quit of me."

For once, Sylvia's keen eye for character was baffled.

"The matter lies in a nutshell," she said to herself. "The girl is jealous of some attentions her husband has been showing a neighbour's daughter. A jealous woman is a dangerous woman while the fit lasts, and it is just as well that she should be here under my eye, so that danger may be nipped in the bud."

After Bryan and the "O'Gorman girl," they passed in review the members of the Shenstone family.

Kathleen shrugged her shoulders and drew her pretty mouth down at its corners significantly when she spoke of Mrs. Shenstone and Uncle Archie. Sylvia alluded to Joyce and Mab.

"One would scarcely believe they were sisters, they were so unlike," she said, feeling her way to Kathleen's likes or dislikes.

"Miss Mab was all goodness and kind-

ness, and all the world loved her," said the girl in reply; "but Miss Joyce was often hard on me — sometimes I hated her."

As to the deaths of their respective brothers, neither mistress nor maid was disposed to be so confidential.

"Ned knew he was playing with edged tools," once Kathleen said when the matter had been lightly touched upon. And Sylvia thought it wiser not to hunt the subject down.

While Kathleen's fingers and tongue were thus perpetually kept in occupation, her eyes also had never so much as a spare moment. Not a detail of Sylvia's daily life escaped them. Every square inch of every cupboard or wardrobe, as well as every corner of every trunk, was in due course laid bare to them.

Sylvia's morning visit to the post-office to fetch her letters was the time when Kathleen's most energetic explorations of hiding-places were carried on.

Within a week of her arrival at Greenock her work of investigation had answered its purpose, and had come to an end. Ned's old silver watch, discovered alongside of Buckingham's gold one in a small box within a trunk, lay in her hand, and the facsimile watch, given her by her father, had taken its place.

To secure two days' holiday from Miss Buckingham, under pretence of seeing her father and mother before she set off on her travels with her mistress, was a comparatively easy task. The watch, not a doubt, must now find its way to Joyce's hand. What results might follow from its so finding its way, Kathleen had not the remotest idea. Loyalty to her promise to her dead brother, had been the mainspring of her action in this matter, and had taught her treachery towards one to whom, judged by her inadequate moral code, she deemed that nothing but treachery was due. Underlying this thought, was the conjecture that Joyce might find a meaning in Ned's bequest which no one else could. It might be a necessary link in a chain of evidence, of which Joyce held fragmentary portions. Or, it might be the enigmatic answer to some question the young lady had once put to Ned. In any case, she had done her part, she said to herself, as she laid the dead brother's watch beneath her pillow at night, and closed her eyes to dream of the old bygone days when she and Ned played childish games of ball in the little cottage garden, or, later

on in life, walked side by side in the grey-green twilight meadows, building castles in the air, of which, alas, there remained not one stone upon another now.

### DUCK DECOYS.

SOMETHING must be done in these bad times. "Make jam," said Mr. Gladstone once; but unfortunately this year there is such a glut of fruit that the figures from jam are as much on the wrong side as those from wheat. "Catch wild ducks," says Sir R. Payne Gallwey; and if we could ensure such takes as the Frieslanders get—from one sea-decoy at the mouth of the Maas, owned by Mynheer van Hecken, the yearly take is seven thousand head, many of which are sent off alive; in the decoy on the Isle of Amrum, North Friesland, one thousand five hundred duck, chiefly pintail, were taken in one day—we should certainly make it pay.

It does not need a big bit of land. The Norfolk birdcatchers, accustomed to the "Broads," laughed at George Skelton of Friskney in Lincoln, who in 1807 made the first regular "decoy" in Norfolk, and was content with two acres. They left off laughing when they found that the takes in this "little puddle" averaged over fifty head per night. Many of the best decoys are smaller than Skelton's. You may make one on your "three acres," and still reserve grass enough for the cow. What you will want is seclusion. Ducks don't like railways; "puffing billy," the steam-threshing machine, is as hateful to them as it is to a high-mettled colt. Shooting disturbs them—the Dutch law forbids a gun to be fired within a thousand yards of a decoy. Then, too, your land must be wet, or the right kind of food will not be forthcoming; and your decoy must be embosomed in wood, though that is a secondary consideration, for willow and privet grow apace, and reed screens, which you will always have to use if you work the thing scientifically, will stand in the stead of other shelter till the trees have come on. You might think that, what with drainage, and manufactures, and the noise of trains; a great part of England was wholly unfit for decoy-work; but one of our best decoys is at Hale, only nine miles from Liverpool and seven from Prescot. Along the Lancashire coast there are any number of places like Hale; and even inland, in what we think of as a

continuous mass of mills and houses, there are bits of lonely undrained moorland admirably suited to the purpose.

In all England there are only thirty-eight decoys. In Essex alone, where now there are three, there used to be thirty. In Lincoln they have gone down from twenty-six to one. Suffolk, in fact, and Nottingham, are the only counties where the pursuit of decoying is at all comparable with its past. In the former, seven decoys are working where there were fourteen early in the century; in Notts there never were more than four, of which three are still kept up.

Scotland never had any decoys; in Ireland there are but three in use, against twenty-two known to have existed. Of these one is historic, that which existed at Parteen, two miles from Limerick. In Donelly's Tour (1681), this is mentioned as "a great decoy belonging to James Fitzgerald, of the Middle Temple, Esquire." Sir R. Gallwey thinks that that made in St. James's Park by the Dutchman, Sydrach Hileus, for Charles the Second, in 1665, was one of the earliest English decoys; so that the art was not long in making its way to the Shannon. Ireland, however, ought to be the home of decoying. The marshes of the Fergus, between Ennis and Limerick; the shores of the Shannon estuary, those of the many shallow loughs, like Sheephaven on the north coast; are as full as they can be of birds; and there can be no reason why the Irish should not catch them as well as the English fen-men used to do, or the Dutch do still.

Farming is in a transition state, and it takes a long time to get us out of our old corn-growing, big-farming groove. By-and-by we shall come to think more of small industries—poultry, butter, and, not least, decoying. All you need do is to stipulate that your decoy shall count among the things for which you are to get compensation when your lease has run out; and then you can start for, say one hundred pounds; and the cost of keeping up, if you do the decoying yourself, is very trifling.

It is a large "if." Few farmers would like to take the trouble to set the decoy-dog to work, and to watch behind the screens while he runs in front of the first screen, behind the next, and so on, till the ducks (most inquisitive of birds) are fairly wild with excitement and swim after him up the decoy-pipe, especially if doggie has a fox's brush tied to his tail and a red rag about his middle.

Silly things these ducks ! Yet it is not always that they are so silly. Sometimes they won't enter the pipe at all. The decoy-man may throw his handfuls of grain ; the decoy-ducks may swim up and eat it, showing the way to their wild friends ; the dog may play his pranks to perfection, but, if dilly is not in the mind, or if he has fed to repletion the night before, he will most provokingly refuse to come and be killed. Birds of this stubborn temper are called "stale," the secret usually being that they have seen your dog often enough to know that he is only a common-place dog, not a marvellous nonsuch, for the sake of investigating whom a duck might deem it well worth while to run into peril.

Once, when a decoy-owner had tried all his own dogs in vain, a lady was persuaded to start her pug at the pipe's mouth, and to signal to him from close by the tunnel net. Pug was very fat, with a red leather collar, a big black spot near it, and a peculiar twist in his tail ; altogether, he was irresistible. The ducks tore up the pipe, and a grand catch was the result. Of course, the dog should never look back at the ducks, else they will think he means fight, and, their cowardice being greater even than their curiosity, they will at once turn tail. He must be perfectly silent, too ; the least whimper would frighten them off, not for that time only, but for ever and aye.

Cats and ferrets are sometimes used, but they are less manageable than dogs. Sir R. Gallwey tells how he once borrowed an organ-grinder's monkey, after whom the ducks flew in swarms, but soon Jacko sprang to the top of a screen, grinned at his pursuers, and began cracking the nuts with which he had been paid beforehand. No wonder every bird fled, not only out of the pipe, but off the decoy. And, to crown all, Jacko tumbled into the water, and nearly died of cold and fright. Of course, when the ducks have been enticed some four yards up the pipe the decoy-man shows himself at its mouth. What are they to do ? Death is behind them ; anything is better than facing their grim enemy. True, they are in a covered ditch, but curving round as it does, it seems open at the far end. Anyhow, they will try ; and so they scurry forward, and into the tunnel net, of which the man or his assistant quickly closes the valve, and then nothing remains but to despatch the victims one by one. The decoy-ducks swim down the moment they see

the man. They are not afraid of him ; indeed, they expect another feed, and he takes care that their expectation is fulfilled. It ought to be said on their behalf, that they do not intentionally deceive their kinsmen. They simply swim up the pipe after the dainty fare which the man keeps scattering in front of them. You cannot blame them, and yet their conduct brings death to those whom it leads forward.

Decoying, then, is a fine art, and it is essentially a Dutch art. The name is Duck-kooy, kooy being a cage ; and our seventeenth-century writers speak of "the new device for catching ducks, known by the foreign name of a koye." Before that time we caught our ducks as the Romans and old Britons, and I do not know how many other nations, did their game, by driving. Of course, this would only do for young things that could hardly fly, and for older birds that were moulting, and were thereby unable to make good use of their wings. The great takes, therefore, in the olden time were in summer, whereas decoying is especially a winter work. Then to drive the ducks, was needed a whole flotilla of boats, and a crowd lining the banks of the lake, at the end of which was your netted pipe. And this meant a great deal of worry, perhaps a pitched battle, about dividing the spoil.

The decoy-man, on the contrary, worked alone, with at most a son or nephew as assistant. He kept his own secrets, which were handed down from father to son ; threw a veil of mystery over his plans ; and spread absurdly inaccurate reports as to his methods. "People who wanted to know" he dreaded and abhorred ; perhaps they would be setting up a decoy for themselves, and then the chances were that fewer birds would visit his water. When he made a great take he said as little about it as possible, for fear of having his rent raised. You might as well expect a conjuror to explain his tricks as a decoy-man to tell his artifices. It was business and experience against the cunning and wildness of the birds ; and why should he let another pick his brains and draw the benefit of his experience ?

These men made money ; but it was a trying life, and the belief that a drop of "something hot" is the best prophylactic against wet did them a deal of harm. Thus George Skelton, son of the Lincolnshire patriarch, killed himself with drink. One of his patrons found him in a one-roomed cottage, on the Norfolk coast, near

Sandringham, lying on a four-post bedstead, to which strings of wild-fowl stretched all round, served as curtains. They made money; though, when thirty-one thousand ducks were caught in one season at Wainfleet alone, no wonder the contract price a century ago was down to five pence a piece. A sober man would save enough to buy a farm; this was done by the last man who worked the Leverington decoy, near Wisbech. The Morden decoy, near Poole Harbour (it is best when you can attract birds fresh from the sea), used to bring in three hundred pounds a year nett, which means at least seven thousand birds. Colonel Leathes's decoy, at Fritton, in Suffolk, used to clear the same sum; but the Lakenheath decoy, in the heart of the Fens, was perhaps the best in England. Seven hundred pounds has been made from it in one season; about fifty years ago a ton of ducks was sent up from it to town twice a week. As lately as 1878 an old keeper saw quite three thousand ducks sitting outside waiting for those inside to be taken out, the decoy being so full that you could not prick a pin in anywhere.

The railway from Brandon to Ely (which thereabouts runs on piles, over a bottomless fen), ruined this decoy. Its glories are gone—gone with the big copper butterfly and the swallow-tailed ditto, who used to abound round Whittlesea Mere. The birds do not come any more than the butterflies.

In the Isle of Axholme (where, by-the-way, there are many "peasant proprietors"), there ought to be still room for a good many decoys. In spite of Sir Cornelius Vermuyden—who spent two hundred thousand pounds in draining, and then (never getting fair play because he was a Dutchman) died in poverty near Thorne, in Axholme—the six thousand acres of Thornewaste, studded with pools, attract not only ducks but wild geese, and even hoopoes and silent swans as well. Here it might be more profitable to work a few decoys than to try to reclaim the land by warping, and to burn the peat into charcoal.

Decoying, then, in contradistinction to driving, came in from Holland along with, or soon after the "Bedford Level" draining, of which, in 1653, Vermuyden was the engineer. Before that time there could have been no decoys in the Fens, for the floods would have destroyed them, or, at least, made them inaccessible during winter. Driving was a summer sport. An old sixteenth century print shows a sea-gulf half covered with little boats, before which are

swimming for their lives some hundreds of ducks. At the head of the gulf are three netted tunnels, from which nets, supported on stakes, branch out some distance along the sides of the gulf. A crowd of men with sticks shout and gesticulate to keep the birds from coming ashore. There is no way of peace except up the gradually narrowing tunnels, at the end of which is death.

As I said, the prey at these drivings was either young birds or birds whom moulting hindered from using their wings. Willoughby tells of four hundred boats and a take of from three thousand to four thousand birds in one net.

In 1432 a mob broke into the duck-pools belonging to the Abbot of Croyland, and "drove" six hundred head; doubtless by beating the reeds and driving the birds into the water.

Driving, however, was a destructive game; and killing off the young birds so lessened the supply that, in 1534, an Act was passed prohibiting all driving between the end of May and the end of August. The law, however, like a good many more of Henry the Eighth's laws regulating life and manners, proved a dead letter. Habit was too strong, and the King's writ did not run "on all fours" in the outlying fen. It was repealed in Edward the Sixth's time; an attempt being made at the same time to protect the eggs; and "the poor people, that were wont to live by their skill in taking of the said fowl, whereby they were wont to sustain themselves with their poor households, to the great saving of other kind of victual, of which aid they are now destitute, to their extreme impoverishing," were allowed to go on driving as before. It was not law, but the scantier supply, owing to the drainage, which set the fenners on the method of enticing. They had begun something of the kind before the Dutch plan was brought in.

The oldest of our decoys (that at Houghton, Notts, for instance) have no long decoy-pipe with tunnel at the end and screens for the dog business and to conceal the watchful decoy-man. They consist simply of a high cage at one end of a pool, with a trap-door which can be closed by working a windlass in a "sight-house" at the other side of the water. To make a good job of it there should be two trapdoors, one at each end of the cage, for ducks always swim against the wind; and, for the same reasons, the more elaborate decoys have five, six, or as many as

eight pipes — one for every wind that blows.

The only existing Derbyshire decoy (at Hardwick) is of the cage kind. A channel between two thickly-wooded islands is netted over, and also parted off into two by a network, and furnished with a door at each end. But the takes in such decoys must always be small.

In France a good deal of decoying is done; the ducks thus caught in the little lake of St. Lambert in Picardy, and sold in Paris, bring some thirty thousand francs a year. The Dutch tunnel-traps are arranged to catch the birds alive without damaging their feathers—a large trade being done in fancy live birds. Some of the pipes lead to a box with valve opening inwards. Into this the birds rush, as they rush in anywhere to be out of sight of the dreadful decoy-man, who blocks their retreat. Of course Holland has unlimited feeding grounds; and the law looks on decoying as a special trade, and protects it accordingly. There are in Holland nearly eighty decoys in active use, and all paying well.

Delightful old Quarles has no picture of a duck-decoy in his "Emblems," although he does sketch a hunting-net, into which the dogs of hell drive those whom "the world's sole sovereign-ranger" does not preserve from them. We may be pretty sure he had never seen a "decoy"; it would have matched so exactly with his "new-drawn net and its entangled prey, and him that closes it," that, had he known of it, he would surely have used it for his purpose. The earliest known picture (1665) of real decoy work depicts a murderous-looking Dutchman, with ringlets and butcher's apron, and a "hanger" at his side, wringing the necks of a netfull of struggling victims.

If you want to read more about decoys, you will find something in Davies's "Norfolk Broads," and a curious account in Dr. Stukeley's "Itinerarium Curiosum." Stukeley is quite correct, whereas the mistakes of writers like Loudon ("Encyclopædia of Agriculture") are as ludicrous as they are astonishing. Loudon's blunders are copied into Brande and Cox's "Dictionary of Science and Art, 1865"—one out of many instances of the "diffusion of misleading error" under the guise of useful knowledge. Writers like Loudon must have been hoaxed by some astute decoy-man, as fond of "greening" inquisitive featherless bipeds as of luring to their doom his feathered victims.

## LUMBER-ROOMS.

THERE would be a sad gap in the annals of fiction, if the convenient garret were swept from its pages. Where else should we find the lost wills? Where else would be stowed away the worm-eaten old chest, which contains the important piece of paper, bearing in the unmistakeable handwriting of the eccentric deceased, the notice which triumphantly confounds the wicked usurper, reinstates more gloriously than ever the virtuous hero or heroine, and confounds, to the delight of all beholders, the clamour of grasping, squabbling relations?

Where, too, would be found those wonderful garments of a dead-and-gone day, in which the heroines of some of our fiction so delight to array themselves? Straying upon some long unopened cupboard or chest by accident; arraying themselves in girlish merriment of heart in quaint flowered brocades, or short-waisted muslin frocks, and then tripping in frolicsome mood, out of the dusty old lumber-room, down the broad oaken staircase, always to meet, on the way, the hero whose heart is straightway taken captive for ever, by the delicious appearance of the present, decked out in the garb of the past.

Those lumber-rooms must bear a magnetic influence on the being of those heroes—their ransacking by girlish hands awaking some answering thrill in their own breasts, for how else could they always appear just at the critical moment, when the maiden, in rustling brocade, trips or flits down the oaken steps?

Where else, but to the out-of-the-way lumber-room, could be sent the heroines, who, lone and lorn, wish to weep out their sorrows unseen; or who, coy and mischievous, run away to hide themselves from their lovers; or who again, in indignant despair, seek it as a sure refuge from the objectionable choice of hard-hearted guardians when they come to pay a morning call? And what other place so suitable for the passionate outflows of genius, burning in the hearts of literary hero or heroine, which, despised by unappreciative relations, are tenderly deposited by their authors on a turned-up box in the peaceful security of some lumber-room, where they soothe their sensitive souls by writing a three-volume novel, or a poem, which lifts them, there and then, to the pinnacle of fame?

Who has not triumphed with them, when they emerge from the dust and cobwebs into the light and glory of Fortune's day? Who has not thrilled with satisfied approval when they have poured coals of fire on dense heads, by nobly laying the burden of the whole family's expenses upon the proceeds of that novel, or that poem?—the unsympathetic relatives having generally been ruined, while that noble work was forming among the cobwebs.

But, if lumber-rooms play an important part in fiction, how should we fare without them in real life, of which, indeed, the things of fiction are but the mirror? What would our houses be, if there were no corners, in which can be gathered up waste materials, the flotsam and jetsam of our daily life's wear and tear?

Any housekeeper can speak feelingly of the rubbish which accumulates insensibly, in spite of her effort to keep down matters to a strictly utilitarian level. There are things which cannot disappear after the complete and astonishing fashion of pins, of whom someone once suggested, that they must have transformed the world into one gigantic pin-cushion. Books, which gave us a pleasant half-hour, and no more, lie covered with the dust of our gratitude up there, in the lumber-rooms; for the fashion of thought which amused us, the ways of the characters which interested us, yesterday, have already given place, to-day, to new thoughts and different ways. With the straight-backed chairs, or bright-flowered chintzes of the past, they lie hidden away in our lumber-rooms and forgotten. To-day we are aesthetic, and sad, and sage-green-hued. To-morrow we may go back to the cheerful tones and comfortable shapes of our yesterday; but in the meantime forms and colours, in the shape of chairs and hangings and remnants generally, of our yesterday, must be hidden out of sight in our lumber-rooms.

There are few of us who do not find some little amusement occasionally, in looking through them. We most of us fancy that among the rubbish, there may just happen to be some treasure-trove. Probably most of us know, or have heard of, someone who has discovered a Teniers, or a Reynolds, or even a Raphael, lost for many years in such a pile of worthless rubbish. We have heard the animated discussions—the account of the enormous sums it was going to bring the happy finder; the magnanimous and patriotic in-

tentions of offering it first to the paternal Government; the decided proofs of its being perfectly genuine. Then suddenly we hear no more; and, as the lucky finder remains in exactly the same position of moderate means as before, and there is no notice in the papers that the British Government has made itself the fortunate possessor of such priceless treasure, we are tempted to think that the Raphael has retired once again to the dust and cobwebs of the store-house rubbish.

Where too, should we poor mortals be, if in the apparently so strangely contradictory terms of our existence, we had not lumber-rooms in our souls' lives?

Each one in his life, has a chamber in which he gathers up strange and varied things. It is kept under strict lock and key, for they are the flotsam and jetsam of our own souls' making, and no other soul could enter into that chamber and understand as we do. Tender fancies, strong convictions, troubled doubts, eager hopes, loves that make our lives glad, and hates that make them sick with bitterness. All hues, all shapes, all ages. The old maid hides away, in that lumber-room, the dead rose-leaves which were once fragrant, and crimson, and living. That grey-haired, weary-faced man, plodding at the treadmill of daily existence, does not show to other eyes the ambitions, the hopes, the plans, which he has put away, like children's wrecked toys, in the dusky corner of his lumber-room. Why should he? They were part of his youth, and youth has been left so far behind that it is scarcely worth while recalling its foolish dreams. Between them and him, as between the old maid and her roses, lies the dust of the grey monotonous years.

There are other things sadder yet than these. There are talents, wasted and wrecked for want of using. There are opportunities thrust away there out of sight, because we were too lazy to take them by the hand and lead them out into the light of our daily life. There are the pathetic things—like the tiny shoe the mother treasures up in some secret drawer, in memory of the coming and going of little feet, stilled to her listening ears for evermore. The hand-clasp 'o' a dead friend, the tender kiss of first love, quaint, lovely fancies of our childhood, which teach us how to live in the lives of our children.

There are grim things, too, sometimes hidden there; skeletons, of which our friends and acquaintance, sitting and eating

at our board—nay, perhaps the very wife of our bosom—know nothing; skeletons, at whose ghastliness we are compelled to gaze at times. Follies of our youth—treacherous thrusts in the dark, whose scar we know lingers yet to-day in the heart of some fellow-creature—cowardly acts, when all ought to have been brave—base self-surrenders, miserable wantings in the balance. To-day we are prosperous and respected, but yesterday those things lived whose skeletons haunt our lumber-rooms still.

But there is compensation, too, in turning over that which we have hidden there. The dust of time gathers slowly but surely on our sorrows, and deadens the sound of our sobbing; and doubts and fears, which used to lurk like so many ugly shapes in its dim corners, are often found to be only rubbish, covered with cobwebs and harmless to hurt our lives, when we enter boldly into our lumber-rooms, and let the light of wisdom and experience gained in life's school, shine upon them. For there is no doubt that human nature troubles itself much over trifles, and often shrinks from a shadow, which, on closer inspection, betrays itself to be only empty clothes.

## THE TRIAL AT JUDD'S FLAT.

A COMPLETE STORY.

### CHAPTER I.

SOME ten years ago a rush, that attracted a considerable amount of attention, took place in the far north of Queensland, and resulted in a temporary mining camp which took to itself the name of "Judd's Flat."

Judd, as may be imagined, was the original prospector, who, finding out this spot of promise, had established himself temporarily there in conjunction with one human companion, four horses and one dog, a couple of rifles, pack and riding saddles, some cooking utensils and mining implements, a store of tobacco and matches, and a small cargo of supplies. He and his "mate" had tested the place with some apparent success, for, their supplies running short, they left the major part of their belongings at the scene of their labours, and returned to the nearest township laden with alluvial gold, for a further supply of the necessities of life; in this case, flour, tea, sugar, and potted meats, termed technically "bully."

But both Mr. Judd and his partner laboured under the popular colonial failing of being somewhat addicted to whisky and rum, and, in consequence of this genial weakness, in a moment of temporary forgetfulness disclosed the position of their El Dorado, and indulged in vivid portrayals of its richness. It was this which led to further action being taken in the matter, and which resulted finally in the mining settlement of Judd's Flat.

The camp itself was situated in the extreme north-east of Queensland. It was a rough and even picturesque spot. Lofty mountains, scrub-covered for the most part, dense, and almost impenetrable, stretched away on all sides. Far away to the horizon, north, south, east, and west, were lifted up the dull-green heads of the hills in seemingly endless chains, the only change in the landscape being a break in the prevailing colour and a gleam of weather-stained grey and brown where the sterile rock, devoid of all vegetation, cropped up and exposed its naked ruggedness in grotesque and fantastic relief. It was a scene of almost savage magnificence; savage in its solitude, in its dead intensity, in its magnitude of detail, in its solemnity of brooding silence.

The long line of tents, gleaming white in the river flat below, the clash and clamour of labour, seemed almost a desecration to these majestic surroundings. All life, activity, and movement seemed out of place in this stronghold and temple of Nature. The everlasting hills, which had been but two short months awakened from their primeval sleep of solitude, were little-fitting adjuncts to the puny labours, the insect toil and strugglings of humanity, going on under their mighty shadows. And yet the desecrating hand of man had dared to encroach even on these silent witnesses of Nature's grandeur; for, winding up from the flat, in an easterly direction, could be perceived the faintly-marked trail that led to the nearest settlement—a mere bridle-track through the scrub, formed by the plodding feet of horses and mules, and intensified by a conspicuous line of blazed trees, growing fainter and fainter in the distance.

The track, winding down from the last scrub-covered hill, narrowed into a rocky gully as it reached the flat, and was almost brought to an abrupt termination by two immense blocks of rock that projected precipitously from the sides of the ravine, and seemed to meet. But a sudden dip in

the track avoided the impediment, and, the overhanging rocks once passed, the camp came into view.

The camp itself was of the roughest and most primitive description. All the buildings were of canvas, some hundred and fifty to two hundred in number, erected without the slightest vestige of order or design, crowding round any spot where a neighbouring tree offered some slight shade, and scattered sparsely over the more open ground.

Every tenth or twelfth tent boasted a flaming announcement to the effect that the best spirits could be obtained within, and was furthermore embellished, for the most part, with a flaunting title, such as, "El Dorado Saloon;" "The Diggers' Own;" "Nugget Hotel;" and so on, according to the taste of the proprietor. In Judd's Flat parlance, these adjuncts to enjoyment, not to say inebriation, were known under the comprehensive name of "poison mills," and the particular decoctions they dispensed, under the humorous titles of "Queensland Lay-me-out;" "Sudden Death;" "'Arthquake;" and other trifling appellatives of a like nature.

Three or four tents, of more pretentious size than the ordinary, and with conspicuous signboards outside, bearing the legends "Store," "Public Store;" "General Store," were the emporia that provided mining humanity, at Judd's Flat, with the necessities of existence. Painted in the rudest characters, all over these homes of enterprise, were numerous announcements for the benefit of the unenlightened miners, such as, "Best price given for gold;" "Old Abe buys dust and nuggets at full weight. Scales inside;" "The True Blue Store has the best lot of goods in the Camp;" "Rally round Honest Bob, the Miner's Friend;" and so on.

Goods, stores, and necessities of all kinds were a terrible price in the camp. In consequence of the mountainous country to be traversed from the nearest place where supplies could be obtained, communication by waggon, dray, or vehicle of any kind was impossible; all carriage having to be done by means of pack-horses and mules. This, combined with the long stages that had to be made without grass or water, consequent on the barrenness of the country, the natural obstacles of the road itself, and the difficulty of obtaining carriers and horseflesh sufficient, caused all stores to reign at famine prices at Judd's Flat. A further reason, likewise, was the hostility

of the blacks, that made it unsafe to travel except in companies of three or four; and the continual risk the carriers ran of having their animals speared, and perhaps losing their own lives.

But, despite all drawbacks, Judd's Flat went ahead and increased. Fresh bone and sinew arrived at the camp almost daily. Gold was plentiful, and of good quality. Assayed in Brisbane it realised four pounds two shillings and sixpence an ounce, the highest price reached in the colonies; though in the camp it fetched much less at the hands of the rapacious bar and store keepers.

## CHAPTER II.

ONE evening, some three or four months after the camp was first formed, an unusual outburst of excitement disturbed the prevailing monotony of this delectable retreat. Theday's work was finished, and Judd's Flat was given over to merry-making and enjoyment—chiefly musical and bibulous. But suddenly the drinking saloons poured forth masses of grimy miners; half-naked figures emerged ghost-like from surrounding tents; cat-like Chinamen flocked from hidden retreats; and in a few moments a noisy, surging crowd had collected in the half-light outside a large tent which bore in front the legend, "Nugget Hotel." That something unusual had occurred, could easily be seen, and something quite out of the ordinary level of Judd's Flat experience, as evidenced by the uproar and excitement. Oaths, noisy demands for information, and cat-calls, testified to the interest the miners derived from the unusual disturbance; but gradually the agitation settled down in a measure as particulars of the cause of the excitement passed from mouth to mouth, and in a short time there was but one word on men's lips as they gathered together in animated discussion, the word—murder.

By some horrible mischance of Fate, a woman, a fortnight previously, had found her way to Judd's Flat. The less said of her and her actions, perhaps the better. She was one of those unfortunates whose home is on the outskirts of civilisation, whose sum of existence is one unenviable record of vice and immorality. Judd's Flat had acknowledged her unexpected presence first in a spirit of derisive curiosity, then with the consciousness of unique possession, and a lenient disregard for frailty and wrong-doing. But now all that re-

mained to it of its sole representative of womanhood, was a bloody mass of disfigured humanity, stretched out in death on the floor of the drinking saloon.

The surging crowd, of which the van had been forced through the open doorway of the tent right into the compartment—room it could hardly be called—in which the body lay, thus brought face to face with the horrible cause of the excitement, disposed itself, after gratifying a first spirit of morbid curiosity, to stormy discussion and enquiry. But before it had time to centre its energies on the matter, a diversion was afforded by the appearance on the scene of the proprietor of the drinking-booth—a short, thick-set man, with a broken nose and a bare lip—who, bursting out hurriedly from the booth, addressed the crowd with great vehemence.

"I take you all to witness, boys," he cried, "that this thing's happened unbeknown to me. It was Hoppy Dave as did it. There's Alligator Joe and Greasy Stewart been inside all the time playing cut-throat euchre with a Chinee, and they'll tell yer the same. Look here, boys, I'm ready to swear it agen Hoppy Dave. He was with her all the evening; they got drunk together. I'll swear it agen him in any court in the country."

In anticipation of this resolve, he thereupon lost no time, but solemnly called upon heaven and earth, together with the several limbs and members of his body, in affirmation of the truth of the accusation. This tirade completed to his satisfaction, he turned to one of the miners standing near and said :

"Have they sent for the police magistrate, Soapy?"

The worthy so addressed nodded in reply, and said :

"He ought to be here by now. There's someone gone for him."

Perhaps one of the most noticeable features of Judd's Flat social life was the peculiar aptness of nickname that characterised each member of the community. Every fresh arrival at the camp, as soon as the taste and discrimination of the residents could unanimously decide on a fit and proper nickname, obtained one; and this thenceforth totally replaced his more lawful patronymic. A good deal of choice humour was evinced in the selection of some of these appellatives; in fact, this sort of nomenclature was quite brought down to a science by the ruling humorists of Judd's Flat.

In the case of the worthy who had responded to the question of the host of the "Nugget Hotel," the name "Soapy" had a certain significance. When the owner of it had first made his appearance in the camp, he had excited hilarity, and even suspicion, amongst the miners, by evincing an unusual and astounding predilection for the daily use of soap and water. This was a course of action so extraordinary, and so diametrically opposed to all the canons of custom and habit, that at the offset even derision was silenced for a time, and profound amazement, tempered with suspicion and distrust, alone greeted the unwonted proceedings. But no immediate disastrous results ensuing, Judd's Flat recovered itself, and, in a fit of retributive pleasantry, dubbed the innovator by the name of "Bar-of-Soap," which subsequently, being found too cumbrous for daily use, was changed to the more familiar "Soapy."

In evidence of the truth of the statement advanced by this worthy, a stir in the crowd and a general cry of "here comes the doctor," announced the approach of the local representative of the might and majesty of the law. As he pushed his way from the dark shadows outside into the flickering half-light that the one sickly lantern hanging outside the booth afforded, his appearance was remarkable and striking in the extreme. He was a man of herculean stature, topping the crowd by fully a head, massive and ponderous of build, a very type of physical strength and vigour. A long flowing beard hid the lower part of his face; but the piercing eye, the straight lines of the nose, indeed the whole expression of his tanned features, spoke of a character full of determination and energy. His dress was not very different from that of the members of the crowd around, except in the distinction of cleanliness. A pair of belted moleskin breeches enclosed his lower person, while a blue-striped Crimea shirt, thrown carelessly open in front, and disclosing the dark lines of a powerful neck and chest, completed his costume.

"What's the matter here? Can't anyone speak?" exclaimed this individual, pushing his way hastily through the crowd.

"It's Swearin' Sal been murdered, doctor," answered Soapy. "She's lying there inside."

"Murdered!"

"Ay; so they say."

"Come, clear out of the road, some of you," ejaculated the other. "Let me get to the woman. Where's Dan Gribblet?"

The proprietor of the drinking booth stepped forward at the summons.

"Here I am. Is that you, Dr. Hamilton?"

"Ay."

"Come on, then; she's lyin' inside. I want to take you to witness that the thing's happened unbeknown to me. You're the police magistrate, and I want to swear agen Hoppy Dave. It was him as did it. Come inside, doctor; come inside, boys; there ain't anything secret about it. I'm goin' to swear a information agen Hoppy Dave to the doctor;" and he emphasized his statement with the usual accompaniment of profanity.

"Shut up," growled the doctor roughly. "You have too much lip altogether. And you," he continued, addressing the crowd more roughly still, "you'd better keep outside, and not interfere. And shut up your row, too."

With that he disappeared inside the booth, accompanied by the proprietor, who still persevered in noisy protestations of his innocence of the affair and accusations against Hoppy Dave.

The crowd outside, silenced in a measure by the all-powerful doctor's words, waited impatiently for results. Evidently the first action of the police magistrate was to clear the room of intruders, for those who had forced their way inside came surging out and joined those outside. The crowd, thus augmented, proceeded to discuss the particulars of the murder, from conflicting points of view, with much argument and animadversion. Soon, however, Dr. Hamilton made his appearance from inside, and a general silence ensued.

"Does any one know anything of this affair?" he asked curtly.

"I do," responded a voice from the crowd.

"Who's I?"

"Alligator Joe," answered the voice, "and there's Greasy Stewart and Thimble-rig Billy, and Ah Kong. We was all there."

"All right," interrupted the doctor, "I shall want you to come with me. Does anyone know where Hoppy Dave is?"

"He's lying drunk in Corrigan's shanty," responded another voice, in tones of disgust. "He's all right there for to-night; he won't move till morning."

"Are you sure he's all right for to-night?"

"Ay; he won't move, not a inch, you can take my word for that," responded the same voice.

"Well, we'll leave him for to-night. Look here, boys, this is a case of murder. It's the first time anything of the kind has occurred here, and we've got to see it through. This woman's been murdered, and it seems that that scoundrel, Hoppy Dave, has done it. I'm going to have a trial to-morrow, and if it's brought home to him he'll get the rope for it. Any of you that knows anything about it had better turn up here at ten o'clock to-morrow, and we'll sheet it home to the scoundrel. Don't make any row about it, but keep your eyes on the cross-eyed brute, and see that he doesn't clear out of the camp. Now break up, boys, and clear out of this, and mind what I've said. We'll make the scoundrel swing for this. Joe, you get Greasy Stewart and the others and come to my tent;" and without more words Dr. Hamilton broke through the crowd and disappeared.

Public excitement was rife, more or less, all that evening. The popular incentives to enjoyment that generally were in vogue after nightfall were, on this occasion, almost entirely abandoned. The cheery strains of cracked fiddles, wheezy accordions, and unreliable concertinas, that usually resounded throughout the camp, were dumb during the whole of that evening. Judd's Flat found enough amusement in profane discussion of the crime; in speculation as to its probable result, and minutiae of its details. The numerous drinking-booths did a roaring trade, especially the two which contained the murderer and all that remained of the victim of the crime. Miners labouring under an overpowering sense of morbid curiosity alternated feverishly between the Nugget Hotel, where lay a motionless heap covered with a dirty blanket, and Corrigan's Booth, where, huddled up in a state of insensible intoxication, reposed a depraved lump of humanity which, when sober, answered to the name of Hoppy Dave.

### CHAPTER III.

At ten o'clock the next morning, the drinking-booth that was to serve as a temporary Court-house was surrounded three deep with miners, eager to witness the unusual proceedings. The sole representative of the might and majesty of the law was Doctor Hamilton. In what manner and for what reasons this man had found his way to the abyssm of Judd's Flat was not known. He

had come and had stayed—that was all that was known; and Judd's Flat, not labouring under impudent or intrusive curiosity as to antecedents, had received him with open arms, and, in token of his attainments, his natural force of character, and terrible physical capabilities, had come to look upon him as the head and oracle of the camp. He practised his profession amongst the miners; low fever, ague, and rheumatism—to say nothing of delirium tremens, and a typical indisposition known as the "horrors" or "shakes"—being some of the many attractions that characterised the mining camp.

In one corner of the canvas building in which the majesty of the law was about to assert itself, the remains of the murdered woman had been deposited. The individual accused, only half recovered from his drunken orgie, had been placed in the centre of the room, and regarded the proceedings with a fatuous look of mingled unconcern and cunning on his brutish features. Filling every inch of the place, with a rear-guard stretching through the open doorway, was the crowd of onlookers. It was altogether a curious and grotesque picture. The bare canvas walls of the compartment flapping heavily to and fro with every breath of wind; the dark and bearded mass of faces; the powerful frames with the bared muscles of arm and chest; the presiding genius of the scene, looking stern and formidable in mighty isolation; the bestial visage of the accused; and the motionless form outlined so sharply in one corner—altogether formed a picture incongruous in detail and grotesque in its entirety.

The police magistrate was seated at one end, on a barrel placed on an empty packing-case, so as to command the situation. Rising to his feet he opened the proceedings by thundering the word "Silence!" Waiting for a moment until his command had the desired effect, he continued:

"You all know what we're here for, boys. A brutal murder has been committed, and we're going to bring it home to the murderer. But before I commence I want to swear in a couple of special constables to help me. Who'll volunteer?"

Perhaps it was the undoubted novelty of the idea in Judd's Flat experience, or perhaps it was a predominant feeling that a certain, though undefinable, amount of dignity surrounded any office connected with the law, or it may even have been

that the appeal came with a certain humorous application; but, at all events, two or three pressed forward in answer to the doctor's summons.

"There; that'll do," he ejaculated ungraciously. "Any two will do. Candiote, and you, Joe; you'll do. Come up here and I'll swear you in. What are you grinning at? Stop it, I say. You resemble a couple of monkeys quite enough without making the likeness any stronger. Come up here."

This sally, which was received with a general burst of laughter, had the desired effect, and the two volunteer upholders of the law approached with the gravity becoming the solemnity of the occasion.

Of these two worthies the one known as Candiote was a beetle-browed Greek of a most forbidding cast of features. The chief characteristic of the other candidate for statutory honours consisted of an undue development of mouth and jaw, which had gained for him the cognomen of "Alligator Joe." These two worthies having been solemnly sworn in, took their places, at the command of the police magistrate, one on each side of the accused, and the trial then commenced in grave earnest.

The presiding magistrate rose to his feet and proceeded to open the case as follows:

"Now, boys, you've all heard what's on the carpet. We've got to bring the murder of this"—he waved his hand callously towards the motionless form in the corner—"home to the man who did it. We haven't got the power to do more than commit the murderer for trial; but, by the powers, boys, we'll send him down to Port Douglas with enough evidence round his neck to hang him. We haven't got any time to waste fooling round, so let's get through the thing right off. Who's the first witness? Stewart, you know something about it. Step forward and let's hear what you have to say."

The individual who responded to this summons, was a lanky, lantern-jawed, ragged-bearded miner, so filthily dirty and disreputable in appearance, as to be, even amongst the unwashed of Judd's Flat, something quite unique and unapproachable. It was a standing boast of his, that he had not used soap and water, in the way of ablution, for over ten years. Indeed, being asked once by an admirer, if he never used water at all, and conscious in his own mind of only one application of the question, he is reported to have answered, without the slightest perception of there being any

latent satire in the words : "No ; I never uses it. It spiles the whisky." This greatly endeared him to the choicer spirits of the camp, and had gained for him the humorous title of "Greasy Stewart."

In answer to the doctor's question, Mr. Stewart scratched his head thoughtfully with both hands before replying.

"Well, it's this way, boss," he said after a pause. "I don't like to go back on a mate. But as this is the lor, why, the lor comes first. Gimme lor, ses I, afore a mate, so long as the lor ain't agen me—"

"Shut up, you fool," roared the magistrate in a sudden access of fury. "Come to the point."

"You take a man up mighty sharp, doctor, you dew," answered Greasy Stewart in an aggrieved voice ; "but you were allus rough on a man. Howsomever, this is what I know. There was me and Alligator Joe, and Thimblerig Billy, and Ah Kong, playin' cut-throat euchre in the next room beyond there. And a mighty rough game it was, boys," he continued, forgetting his grievance in the interest of recital. "There was Ah Kong sitting there all night with such luck as never was. Bowers and aces—he held 'em all night. You never saw anything like it. Plank down a ace, there was Ah Kong with a left bower. Shove down a left, and he'd bang the right bower on top of it. Hand out the right, and, by thunder! out'd come the joker and bust you up. Luck such as you never—"

"By thunder!" roared the magistrate, interrupting once again the flow of Greasy Stewart's oratory, "if you don't say what you've got to say, and shut up that fooling, I'll stiffen you."

"Well, as I was sayin'," the greasy one continued hastily, not further noticing this sally, "there was us four playing cut-throat euchre, when, suddenly we hears a scream coming from inside here, and Swearin' Sal's voice yellin' 'murder!' We slammed the cards down on the table, and rushed in here. I was fust, and I see Sal lyin' all of a heap on the floor, and Hoppy Dave makin' tracks through the door."

"Will you swear it was the prisoner you saw escaping from the room?"

"Swar? Yes; I'll swar. I seed him plain enough."

"And there was nobody else in the room?"

"No; because we could hear their voices all through the evening. They was drinkin' together alone all the time."

"Was the woman dead when you first saw her?"

"Dead as a coffin, doctor."

"And that's all you know about it, is it?"

"That's all, boss."

"Very well, then, you can stand down. Where's Thimblerig Billy? I want him next."

The gentleman answering to this title immediately stepped forward, and began to deliver his evidence with astonishing fluency. In point it was similar to that delivered by his predecessor, and corroborated that gentleman's statements. The speaker laboured under a predominant sense of politeness, and constantly referred to the murderer and the murdered as this 'ere gent and that 'ere lady. "We all rushed in together," he said, "and I saw this 'ere gent"—courteously indicating the murderer—"vamoosin' through the door, and that 'ere lady"—waving his hand with ghastly politeness in the direction of the motionless heap in the corner—"lying in a pool of blood on the floor."

There was something horribly incongruous in this grotesque politeness, though the exponent of it evidently prided himself upon its happy use.

The third witness, Alligator Joe, gave similar evidence, and even volunteered further information for the benefit of anyone sympathizing with unmerited misfortune in connection with the game of cut-throat euchre, in which he and his companions had been engaged.

"We planked down the cards," he said, in tones of natural indignation, "and rushed out, never thinking that things wouldn't be right, but, when we came back, dang me if the stakes wasn't clean gone—every penny we had anted up for the game. I expect it was that cuss of a Chinaman, Ah Kong. He'd rob a graveyard if you didn't watch him."

The Celestial referred to, who was in the room, contented himself with smiling pleasantly in return, and observing gently :

"Not me, Billy; alle same, 'nother mans. Welly good me. No stealee money."

Another witness being called by the magistrate, some symptoms of impatience were exhibited by the audience, whose interest in the proceedings was rapidly on the wane. Judd's Flat was not in the habit of paying strict attention very long to anything outside its usual business, except, perhaps, card-playing and drinking,

and it now felt itself entitled to some reward in consideration of its self-denial and strict observance of all legal etiquette.

A big-boned, athletic miner embodied the sentiments of his companions in a neat little speech. Pushing himself forward, he addressed himself to the company generally.

"This is all A 1," he said, "and all reg'lar and lorful, but it's mighty dry, boys. I propose that this Court adjourns for five minutes, and gets a drink all round."

A chorus of cheers and laughter greeted this interruption, with cries of, "Bully for you, Sam;" "That's the ticket," and other encouraging remarks; but Dr. Hamilton, jumping up from his seat and glaring savagely round, roared in a stentorian voice:

"I'll break the ribs of any man who interrupts this trial; and I'll charge him half-a-dozen ounces of gold for setting them again. Do you hear what I say? Keep quiet."

But even this threat failed to put a stop to the disturbance, and the magistrate, seeing his authority weakening, with the tact that was one of the principal features of his influence in the camp, exclaimed:

"The Court can't adjourn; but there will be five minutes' interval allowed for refreshment. Where's Dan Gribblet? Here. Whisky for the crowd."

A second storm of cheers and shouts ensued, and good humour was generally restored. A further subject of discussion arose, when the whisky was produced, as to the propriety of allowing the accused to participate in its consumption; but on his whining assurance that "he was as dry as a tinker's dog," compassion over-ruled all feelings of a sterner nature, and a quart pot (termed technically a jack-shay) containing about a quarter of a pint of the raw spirit was handed to him. With a diabolical wink the recipient tossed off the welcome allowance, and the proceedings started afresh.

The next witness examined was a Chinaman, who had been in the drinking-booth at the time of the murder. Being called forward, the almond-eyed Celestial showed a characteristic amount of agitation.

"What's the good of asking him?" growled a miner in the crowd. "He don't know enough English to bail up a cow with."

"Silence!" roared the magistrate. "Now, Li Ling, you were in the place at the time, weren't you?"

"Me no savee!" exclaimed the China-

man excitedly. "Me good evening, chow-chow."

"What does he mean?" ejaculated Doctor Hamilton impatiently.

A half-suppressed burst of laughter greeted the Chinaman's frantic efforts to make himself understood, and there was quite an uproar, until the smiling Ah Kong stepped blandly forward and volunteered an explanation.

"He mean he don't savy anything about it. He was eating his tea."

A fresh burst of laughter greeted this explanation, and the intelligent witness was thrust aside and another called. A second little interval, however, ensued at this juncture by the prisoner's asking audibly for the loan of a pipe. After the whisky had been passed round pipes had been generally produced and lighted, for in Judd's Flat experience drinking could never be satisfactorily indulged in without the accompanying gratification of smoking. Seeing his fellow miners enjoying themselves in this fashion, Hoppy Dave entreated strenuously for the like privilege, and a lighted pipe being passed to him, he sucked at it with every appearance of interest and gratification.

The next witness called was a miner who had been drinking at the bar, and had seen nothing but the retreating form of the accused murderer. However, he protested that he could identify the prisoner, and so was heard.

"All I saw," he said modestly, "was him a-making tracks like a kangaroo, but I knowed him by the patch on his breeches. There never was any villainy going on in this camp but that patch was mixed up in it. So long as there was any fighting, or lying, or stealing, or cheating, going on, that patch'd be fandandering round in it, sure as eggs is eggs. I'd swear it agen it in any court."

But this witness's evidence being received with incredulity, he very justly retired in umbrage, and refused to lend further countenance to the proceedings.

"Call this lor!" he exclaimed, in irreverently expressed disgust, "I call it rot."

Subsequently to this the proceedings came to a somewhat sudden termination. Three other witnesses were called, and their evidence going to prove unanimously the guilt of the accused, the presiding magistrate exercised his prerogative by hurrying over the remainder of the trial. There could not be the slightest doubt as to the prisoner's guilt—it was thoroughly established in the minds of all; and this stage of

the proceedings arrived at, Dr. Hamilton rose suddenly to his feet and exclaimed :

"That will do, boys. The prisoner is found guilty of murder, and committed to take his trial at Port Douglas. He'll get the rope for it there, there is no doubt about that. I should like to do a bit of Judge Lynch on my own account, but we must mind what we are doing, and act according to the law, or we shall have the mounted troopers down on us. What we have got to do is to send him down to Port Douglas to take his trial before the Supreme Court. I shall send him at the first opportunity; in the meantime, I hold the special constables responsible for his safety. The witnesses will be bound over to attend the Supreme Court sittings at the Port. It's got to be done, boys; so you may make up your minds to it. The Court won't sit for two months, so you'll have plenty of time to make preparations. I look to the two special constables to guard the prisoner until I can find means of sending him down. I want you, Stewart, at my tent. Break up now. The Court is dissolved."

"What, boss!" exclaimed Candiote with an oath, "do you mean to say Alligator and me has got to look after Hoppy Dave, till you send him down to the Port?"

"That's what I mean," responded Dr. Hamilton roughly. "The public good requires it. I'll get rid of him in a day or two, and you'll be paid for your time."

"Blow that!" exclaimed the Greek violently, aghast at the responsibilities attending his voluntary office. "D'y'e think a man's goin' to waste his time lookin' arter—and then have to go to the Port—"

"That's what it comes to, and you've got to do it. The Court's dissolved."

"Well, I'm darned!" interjected Alligator Joe, in disgust, "if this ain't a sell."

"But I say, boss," cried Candiote.

"I tell you the Court's dissolved. That's enough."

#### CHAPTER IV.

THE subsequent proceedings of the committed murderer and his impromptu guard, not being immediately under the judicial eye, were enveloped in a certain amount of mystery. After the trial, it being unanimously considered throughout Judd's Flat too late to resume the interrupted labours of pick and shovel, the rest of the day was given over to uproarious dissipation and merry-making. That Hoppy Dave and his guard of honour

—Candiote and Alligator Joe—participated in the festivities, was an easily ascertainable fact, for the three worthies, directly the proceedings of the Court were finished, became the objects of numerous delicate attentions at the hands of emotional miners. A certain halo of romance surrounded prisoner and guards, which could not fail to excite a morbid kind of admiration in the minds of the indiscriminating idlers.

Not—it must in justice to Judd's Flat morality be stated—that Hoppy Dave was received with any great favour himself; indeed, he was generally shunned for some time; and some latitudinarians, eager for fresh developments, gave loud expression to their conviction that lynching would be a fit and proper ending to the imposing ceremonial at the extempore Court-house. But, as he was perforce a necessary adjunct to the company of Candiote and Alligator Joe—and was, moreover, not backward in asserting himself—Hoppy Dave received a fair share of the attention paid to those worthies.

Morally speaking, he himself seemed brutishly unconscious of the horror of the crime and his position. Shame was so dead within him that he could mingle, seemingly without a thought, in the dissipation going on around. He was not in any way confined—that would have been impossible in the camp, where canvas served in the place of stone, brick, and wood—but he was kept under some kind of supervision by his two attendants. However, there seemed to be a perfect understanding between the three. The bond was not so indissoluble as to be in the least galling.

Towards the close of the afternoon Judd's Flat was in a perfect state of uproar. A great fight was taking place on the outskirts of the camp, and scores of half-drunken miners were hurrying to witness the exhilarating spectacle. Alas for the lapse of judicial dignity! One of the combatants was none other than Candiote, the volunteer abettor of law and justice. The Greek was in a state of frantic intoxication. He and his opponent were surrounded by a ring of grinning miners, and behind him stood Hoppy Dave, in the character of second and backer.

"I'm Candiote, the budiful Greek," yelled that worthy, his long, coal-black hair and beard streaming wildly about him. "When I was in Parry they called me the budiful Greek; I'm glorious as Apollo, and fight and tear like a wild cat. I'm

Candiote, with the teeth of the lion and the grip of the vulture. I'm the blood-thirsty Greek!" and an appalling volley of oaths finished the tirade.

The fight was short and decisive. The Greek was too drunk to last long, and a few tremendous blows from his opponent stretched him on the ground.

"That's me!" yelled the victorious pugilist, in a burst of drunken triumph. "When Greek meets Greek then comes the tug of war; but when Greek meets Jock, the wild Hielandmon, he's up a wattle."

Subsequently some little excitement arose again, in consequence of the proceedings of the prisoner and his guards. A temporary relapse of the mutual understanding existing between the three must have arisen from some cause or another, for, some time afterwards, the prisoner was seen wildly pursuing one of the special constables—Alligator Joe—with an immense stone in his hand, whilst the object of his pursuit was seen flying in advance in a paroxysm of drunken fright. But evidently, later on, Hoppy Dave forgot his resolve to "do for" his escort, for the three were seen in the El Dorado saloon, getting uproariously drunk in mutual good fellowship.

Next day further development ensued, and ended all immediate connection between the murderer and Judd's Flat. It was through the good offices of a carrier returning to Port Douglas far a load of supplies, that the camp was relieved of the burthensome presence of Hoppy Dave.

Early on the morning following the trial, the police magistrate interviewed the carrier in question, and proposed to him that he should take charge of the prisoner and convey him to Port Douglas. But some little difficulty ensued as to the particulars and remuneration for the job.

"It's this way," said the cautious carrier, "I've got twenty pack-horses to keep, and I can't work 'em without getting well paid for it. I gets a hundred pound a ton for goods coming up from the Port, and they're what you may call dead loading. You puts them on a pack, and there they is. But this 'ere carting of live stock 'taint so much in my line. You can't sling him across a pack-saddle and strap him down. You've got to feed him, to say nothin' of his contamernating a pusson, or perhaps murdering him."

"There would be no fear of that," returned the police magistrate, "I shall send

him down in charge of one of the special constables. All you would have to do would be to give them horses and food during the journey, and keep them company. If you like to take the job, say so."

"Well, I'm allus willing to turn a honest penny. There'd be two of them. Well, they'd weigh both of 'em together, I expect, about three hundred and fifty to four hundred pounds. Give me a bit of a show, and say a quarter of a ton. Well, I gits a hundred pound a ton for dead loadin'—say twice as much for live loadin', including tucker. I'll do ye the job for fifty pounds."

It is, however, hardly a matter of interest to descend to minute details; it is sufficient to state that some arrangement of the kind was finally agreed upon. But an almost insuperable objection to the arrangement cropped up in the fact of both the special constables flatly refusing to leave the camp. The magistrate stormed, threatened, and appealed in vain; both Candiote and Alligator Joe evidently thought they had sacrificed themselves sufficiently on the altar of judicial folly—a state of feeling shared in unanimously by the whole of Judd's Flat. But at the last moment a saving arrangement was entered into, by which the carrier and his mate were sworn in by the magistrate as specials, Candiote and Alligator Joe being formally deposed. The new guards of honour received minute instructions from the magistrate as to the disposal of their prisoner on arrival at Port Douglas, together with warnings as regarded his safe convoy. And so, everything being finally arranged, the cavalcade set out on its two hundred miles' journey amidst the plaudits and vociferations of assembled Judd's Flat; and the camp was relieved of the sinister presence of Hoppy Dave, the murderer.

The sequel to this episode is well known throughout the north of Queensland, although the details are not, to any extent, a matter of history. Of what passed on that long journey little or nothing is known; but it is not difficult to form a probable notion of what took place. The long day's ride through the solitude of the bush; the enforced companionship and immediate familiarity of camp-life; the song, the jest, the anecdote, and the unconventional free-and-easy association round the camp-fire; the mutual stand against the difficulties, and even dangers, of the road; all must of necessity have engendered a feeling of good-fellowship between the three. Hoppy Dave, too, had an

acknowledged reputation for power of oily persuasion, and what was known technically throughout Judd's Flat as "gammon;" and the three interested parties alone know what powers of eloquence and inducement, what promises and affirmations, he may have indulged in. However, be the particulars of the journey down to the coast settlement as mysterious as they may, the sequel was none the less patent.

It is known that the three travellers from Judd's Flat arrived safely at Port Douglas; that no word was said by the carriers in charge of any crime having been committed; that no hint was dropped of their companion being a prisoner; but that they all three adjourned, immediately on arrival, to the first public-house, and got rapidly drunk together in the most perfect harmony. This being so usual an occurrence in the township, attracted little or no attention; nor did the subsequent fact of the orgie being carried on for several days; nor did the disappearance soon after of one of the participants in the debauch excite the slightest attention at the time, for the town was totally in ignorance of the crime that had been perpetrated at Judd's Flat.

But such, in actual fact, were the proceedings of the trio from the mining camp. Hoppy Dave—in a spirit of incomprehensible compassion, or disregard on the part of his guard—was set at liberty, and, disappearing from the colony for ever, was absorbed in the whirlpool of southern civilisation.

And so ended the farce of the trial at Judd's Flat.

## JANE COSENTINE.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

### CHAPTER II.

IT was the middle of October. The days were clear, and bright, and cold, with sunshine out of doors and fires within. Jane sat by the fire one evening, just at the hour when twilight merges into dusk, and knitted away monotonously and mechanically, and looked into the fire, and mused.

Presently the door of the sitting-room opened, and Dora looked in.

The sight of the firelight or of Jane sitting there, seemed to please her, and she came in, taking off her hat and cloak as she came, and depositing them tenderly on one of the stiff-backed chairs that stood ranged against the parlour walls. Then

she came and knelt down near Jane, within the ruddy glow of the firelight, and held up, in a teasing way, a little bunch of hips and haws and crimson leaves to Jane's view.

In the firelight, Jane's face had as bright and warm a colouring as Dora's, and the sisters looked wonderfully alike—much more alike than they would have seemed in a less deceptive light. They had the same delicately-cut, regular features, and hair of the same colour, gathered back in much the same fashion into a loose knot behind; but Dora's had a more decided ripple in it than Jane's, and little stray tendrils had a way of escaping about her brow. They were of the same slender build, and they were dressed alike, in dark-blue, closely-fitting dresses, with white collars and cuffs. The difference between the girls lay in manner and expression. There the points of contrast were marked enough.

Jane glanced up for a moment, without pausing in her knitting.

"Very pretty," she said, unenthusiastically.

"You are very pretty," said Dora, addressing her gay little nosegay. "And you have a story connected with you, which makes you prettier still. You and I and somebody know it—nobody else."

She looked up furtively at Jane, to see if she was curious. But Jane showed no interest; her whole attention was concentrated on the stocking she was knitting.

"They grew ever so much higher than I could reach," said Dora. "Don't you wonder how I got them?"

"Some one picked them for you, I suppose," said Jane, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yes, somebody. Such a wonderful somebody! A much grander somebody than anyone who ever got hips and haws for you, Jane."

Jane made no reply, and Dora was silent for some minutes. She seated herself on the rug, and began to select some of the brightest of the leaves, and to fasten them in the brooch at her throat. When she had done that to her satisfaction, she began to talk again.

"Mr. Cholmondeley has come home again, Jane; have you heard?" she said.

"Yes, I did hear it. I wonder myself that his father consents to receive him."

"What nonsense! Why should he not receive him? What did he do, Jane? I never heard exactly the truth of it. I was at school, and mother wouldn't tell me."

"It is not a story that one cares to talk about," said Jane, severely. "He behaved

very badly—abominably ! He was forced to go away, people were so indignant with him. Poor little Sophy Williams was sent away too, and her father and mother have never held up their heads since. They were so respected, too ; such good, virtuous, honest people, and so proud of that girl."

"Yes," said Dora, "I thought that was it ; but why did people throw all the blame on him ? Sophy was always a nasty little thing, vain and affected, and above her station. So were all the Williamses. I dare say they encouraged him. Perhaps they thought he was going to marry her ; —he, a gentleman, and she, a small farmer's daughter ! and not even pretty ; quite a common girl too, with such a country way of talking."

Jane did not argue the point ; it was not worth while. Dora was wrong ; but other people's opinions, whether true or false, were of no consequence to Jane ; and, if her sister chose, for contradiction's sake, to defend the Squire's son, she might do it.

"I wonder," said Dora presently, "why wickedness makes people so interesting and gentlemanly. It does. Now look at Mark : he is the very best, most estimable, respectable person in the world, but he's very stupid. He is heavy and dull, just like a beetle ; and I don't think Mark looks much like a gentleman either. He wears his hair so long and thick, and I don't like the coats and hats he gets."

Jane had stopped knitting during this rambling speech, and was looking sharply and steadily at her sister.

"Dora," she said, "who gave you those berries you were making such a mystery about ?"

"Oh, you don't feel any interest in that," said Dora, with a little pout.

Jane put her hand on Dora's shoulder and spoke in a tone of stern authority—a tone that Dora was a little afraid of, and always obeyed.

"Who gave them to you ?" she repeated.

"Suppose I tell you ? You'll be cross."

"That depends."

"And I can't help it if you are. I didn't ask him to pick them for me. And I couldn't throw them in his face when he had done it."

"Do speak clearly, Dora. Don't beat about the bush."

"Why should I beat about the bush ? I was close to Burleigh Wood, and I was just reaching up for these, and Mr. Cholmondeley came up behind me and said ever so politely : 'Allow me to get them for

you ;' and then he picked them and gave them to me, and he made a very pretty compliment too, which I shan't tell you. I don't see why people say things about him. He is very nice, as far as I can see ; and he is handsomer than anyone I know. I like a moustache that tapers off fine at the tips and then turns up. And he thought me pretty, too, I know. I knew it by the way he looked at me. He walked all the way through the wood with me. You needn't glare like that. I didn't ask him to come—but I couldn't tell him I didn't want him."

"You could have done something," said Jane severely. "You should have shown him you did not want him."

"You would have, I dare say. You enjoy being unpleasant to people; I don't."

"Never mind what I enjoy," said Jane ; "but listen to me. It is as much as your reputation is worth, to be seen speaking and walking with Mr. Cholmondeley. He knew that, if you did not, and he had no business to force his company upon you. Now you know, too. He is a gentleman, and in quite a different position from us——"

"I don't see that the position is so very different. Father is not a common farmer."

"The position is different," asserted Jane. "Even if nothing were known against Mr. Cholmondeley, you could not be seen speaking to him out of doors without people talking about you. As it is, you must not let him speak to you. He would never have dared to speak to a girl of his own class unless he had known her already—can't you see that, Dora ?"

"Those girls are so ugly—most of them," said Dora, self-complacently. "I don't suppose he would care so much about getting them hips and haws, and things."

Jane ignored this vain little speech.

"Promise me," she said, "that if he attempts to stop you again, you will have nothing to say to him ; you will not let him speak to you. Promise me, Dora, or I shall tell father."

"Very well ; I promise," said Dora, hastily ; and at that moment the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of their mother, so Dora made good her escape.

Jane had spoken more seriously than she had felt, as one does sometimes in endeavouring to impress children and those whose intellect one deems inferior. She did not think it probable that Mr. Cholmondeley would attempt to pursue his acquaintanceship with Dora ; and if he did so, Dora would surely have sufficient com-

mon sense to repel any such attempt ; but she had deemed it well to frighten her, and so to stimulate the prudence and common sense for which she gave her credit. Then she thought no more about the matter.

A fortnight passed before she had again any cause for anxiety. Going suddenly into her sister's room, one night, she surprised Dora standing close to the table, with the candle drawn very near her, and her left hand held out to the light. The light fell on a ring she wore, and the ring sparkled and shone as Mark's turquoise and pearl ornament could never have done. Jane was not always very observant, however ; and she might have noticed nothing, had not Dora started guiltily and made a quick suspicious movement to hide her hand, placing the other over it.

" You have a new ring," said Jane. " Is that another present from Mark ? "

" No. It's nothing—quite a common old thing."

" It was glittering almost like a diamond. Where did you get it ? " said Jane.

" Oh, I bought it ever so long ago—at school. It's glass—crystal—what do you call it ? It didn't cost much. What do you want ? A hair-pin ? Oh, yes, I can give you one—have another—take two or three, Jane. Isn't it cold ! To-morrow's Sunday. How does your dress fit now you've altered it ? Don't keep the door open, it makes the candle flare. Good night."

Jane was dismissed. She went away with a vague feeling of uneasiness weighing upon her ; and she went to bed and dreamed that Dora was married to their old drawing master at school, and wore a wedding-ring with a diamond in it ; and that Mark came back to find Dora ; and his face had great lines of sorrow on it, and he looked at her, Jane, with a look of such hopeless misery and reproach, that she could not bear it, and turned away sobbing from him. She awoke crying bitterly, for Mark and her own helplessness to help him.

That little incident served to make Jane more alert, more ready to worry and suspect. A day or two later, one hopelessly wet afternoon, Dora came downstairs equipped for walking, and explained briefly to Jane, who was at the foot of the stairs, that she was going out for a little while.

" But it's raining, Dora," Jane expostulated. " Why do you want to go out in such weather as this ? "

" Well, I do," said Dora. " I must go out. I have a headache. I always went

out every day at school. I like it." And Dora was gone before Jane could say another word.

Jane did not know what she suspected or why she was anxious ; but a vague feeling of uneasiness was weighing upon her spirits, and when an hour had passed and Dora had not returned, she determined to go and meet her. She dressed quickly and went out, but her walk was fruitless ; she did not meet Dora, and, at last, telling herself that Dora must have returned before this, she bent her steps homewards again.

A neighbour's wife was leaving the house as she came into the yard, and the woman, whom she knew well, darted a keen, unfriendly glance at her, and gave a short little nod and hurried on without speaking.

Jane scarcely noticed the unfriendliness ; she had caught sight, at that moment, of Dora sitting sewing before the window of an upstairs room, and was only conscious of a feeling of relief.

As she entered the passage, her mother called out shrilly to her from the parlour. Jane took off her wet cloak, and hung it up and went in.

" Why, wherever have you been to, Jane ? " said Mrs. Cossentine, in a tone of fussy expostulation. " What in the world made you go out in such weather as this ! —bringing muck into the house, and getting your death of cold. And here's Susan been here with a cock an' bull story about you or Dora—one or the other of you—walking about with the young Squire, Mr. Cholmondeley, up to Hall. I told her she could mind her own girls, and I'd mind mine. She said she'd seen you with her own eyes. Fools see a fine sight more than anyone else in the world."

" What did she mean ? " said Jane, sharply. " Was it me she had seen ? I don't understand."

" You or Dora. She couldn't even tell which of you. She'll mind her own business for the future, I hope."

" But where ? " said Jane, ignoring the latter part of this remark.

" How do I know where ? I couldn't make head or tail of her story—and didn't want to. Down Burleigh Wood way, so she said. A fine day to go walking in Burleigh Wood, said I. She caught sight of the young Squire, and a girl long with him with a blue cloak. She only saw the back of the girl. Then she must spread this gossip, and gossip's sooner spread than contradicted. You haven't been down near Burleigh, have you ? "

"No," said Jane, "I went the other way."

"And where's Dora?"

"Dora is not out," said Jane, shortly; "she is upstairs sewing."

She went out of the sitting-room, closing the door after her, and leaving her mother grumbling, and went slowly upstairs to the room where she had seen Dora at work. The story she had just heard was full of meaning for her; its meaning had flashed upon her as soon as her mother had begun to speak; it seemed almost as though it were a confirmation of some suspicion which had been in her mind before.

She went upstairs very slowly, thinking of what she should say, of what arguments would tell most with Dora, thinking with great bitterness of soul, and with a sort of stern resentment against her sister. She had no love for Dora: she felt no pity for her. There was no tenderness on her face, only inexorable severity, when she entered the room where Dora sat, and stood, accusingly, before her.

"Dora," she said, speaking very quietly, with forced calmness, "you have been meeting Mr. Cholmondeley this afternoon. Do not deny it. I know. Put down your sewing and listen to me, and try, for once, to tell me the truth. You have met him today; how often before have you met him?"

Dora's face grew almost as pale as Jane's. She let her sewing fall, and looked up with frightened eyes at her sister.

"Does father know?" she said breathlessly.

"Never mind who knows," said Jane. "Answer my question, Dora. How often have you met him before this afternoon?"

Dora did not answer. She leant her head against the wall and began to cry. Jane waited for a minute. Then, as the tears still flowed on, she lost patience.

"Crying will not mend matters," she said. "How often have you walked in Burleigh Wood with Mr. Cholmondeley?"

"I don't know," sobbed Dora.

"Often?"

"No; not often."

"Did you go there on purpose to meet him?"

Dora wept profusely.

"I don't see any harm in speaking to him," she sobbed, with a sort of forced resentment.

Jane ignored this, and repeated her question: "Did you go there purposely to meet him, Dora?" she said slowly and sternly.

"Yes, I did. There wasn't any harm in that."

"He asked you to meet him?"

"Yes."

"What did he talk to you about?"

"About all kinds of things. I'm not going to tell you what."

"He made love to you, I suppose?"

No answer.

"Dora?"

"Yes—he was nice to me, if you call that making love."

"And he gave you the ring which you hid from me?"

Dora was silent, and Jane interpreted the silence as acquiescence.

"What else has he given you?" she continued.

Dora dried her eyes, and looked up at Jane, trying to speak in an aggrieved tone. "I don't see that I am forced to tell you everything," she said. "It can't matter to you."

"No," said Jane pitilessly, "it does not matter in the least to me; but it matters very greatly to you; and it matters to Mark. I am not doing this for your sake or for my sake, but for his. He loves you, Dora. Do you think it will be pleasant for him to find scandal busy with the name of the girl he loves? Have you no thought for him at all?"

"Mark would never know. How should he know? There is no harm in being pleasant to a person when you see him. Besides, I don't like Ernest—Mr. Cholmondeley, I mean—better than Mark. I did like him better at first, but I don't now. He frightens me; and he makes me come out when I don't want to."

"Makes you?"

"Yes. He does make me, though he only asks me to."

There was a pause, then Jane went back to her old question. "What else has he given you, Dora?"

"He gave me a chain one day and a brooch, a very little one."

"Where are they? Get them."

"Why?"

"Get them, Dora. I am going to send them back to him."

Dora began to weep again more bitterly than ever.

"Jane, you mustn't; he will be angry; you don't know him! He would only make me take them all back again."

"His anger will make little difference," said Jane. "You need not go out alone again, and then he can never dare to speak to you."

"But I must go. I have promised. I said I would meet him to-morrow."

"You can break the promise, then."

"I can't, Jane. It is easy for you to talk—you don't know him. He will come here or write. He threatened to one day. He would do anything ; he is not afraid of anyone. I must go to-morrow. I will take the things with me, if you like. I will give them back to him. I'll say that you have made me. I'll tell him that you have found it all out, and that I can't come again. But I must go this once."

"Dora," said Jane, leaning forward towards her sister, and speaking very slowly and decidedly, "you cannot go. You were seen to-day, and you must not run the risk of being seen again. Luckily Susan was not sure which of us it was ; but she knew it was one of us. I told mother that you were indoors. If people gossip, they can gossip about me. I am not engaged to Mark, so it does not matter. You cannot meet him again. I will send back the things and write to him and explain—"

"Write!" cried Dora, more worldly-wise than Jane in some things. "And if he showed the letter, everyone would know."

"Then I will take the things," said Jane. "I will go and meet him to-morrow, instead of you. I will tell him that you have met him without our knowledge, because you were too young and foolish to know better. And I will appeal to his good feeling not to persecute you again. Now get the things for me."

Dora did as she was bid. Jane made the presents her sister had received into a little parcel, and put it by, ready for the morrow. Dora made no further protest. Her spirits, as Jane noticed bitterly, were gayer that evening than they had been for a long while. Dora was like a child : if the tears flowed one hour, the smiles were all the brighter the next. She had grown to fear Mr. Cholmondeley too, and was more relieved than Jane knew at the prospect of his dismissal.

It was late in the afternoon when Jane set out, next day, on her unwelcome errand. She reached the wood before the time that Dora had named, and she had to wait. The trysting-place was just at the outskirts of the wood, at a stile which led from the wood into a meadow. Mr. Cholmondeley would not come through the meadow, Dora had said, but through the wood itself. Jane stood by the stile and waited.

Presently footsteps, coming along the meadow-path, fell upon her ear, and she turned round hastily to see who the comer

might be. A man and a woman were coming through the meadow, and the woman was the neighbour, Susan Baker, who had passed this way yesterday when Dora had been in the wood. The meadow-path ran along by the hedge, and the hedge was in a straight line with the stile. Susan and her companion had nearly reached the stile ; but they were looking on the ground and had not seen Jane yet. She drew back a little, and was just about to retreat.

At that moment, Mr. Cholmondeley coming through the wood, espied the slim little figure, in the long blue cloak, waiting just before him, and took Jane for Dora, as it was easy in the dim light for anyone to do. He came quickly forward, and had his arm round Jane's waist before she knew that he was near.

"I have kept you waiting, pretty one," he said, and he bent and kissed her before she could draw herself away.

At that moment the two villagers, coming through the meadow, reached the stile. They had seen the meeting and heard the words. They also saw Jane start aside, and Mr. Cholmondeley look foolish and start aside likewise, murmuring some incoherent apology. But such confusion was not surprising ; to the good country folks who witnessed it the confusion was as condemnatory as the tender words and caress that preceded it. Susan got over the stile, looking hard at Jane the while ; the man followed her, gazing steadily at the branches overhead, doing his best, in a clumsy way, to appear unconscious of Jane's presence.

They went on their way through the wood, and Jane stood looking after them until they were out of sight. In those few moments she suffered the bitterest martyrdom that a woman can ever suffer. She realised the position—she realised her disgrace, and accepted it. Mr. Cholmondeley was powerless to hurt Mark now ; she had saved Dora's good name—saved it in the most effectual way—she had bought it with her own. That, and all the shame and bitterness which must follow, flashed in a few brief moments through her mind. Moments of intense misery are moments of insight too ; nothing that happened through the next few months came as a surprise to Jane—she had realised the worst that the future could hold.

She watched the neighbours out of sight. Then she turned to Mr. Cholmondeley, and explained her errand.